



# Community Budget Meetings

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, February 18, 2008

## City Hall Diary

This week at council we discussed the upcoming 2008-2009 budget process.

The budget for San Jose is a year-round process tracking the revenue that comes into the city, like sales tax and construction and conveyance tax (C and C), and expenditures that come from the General Fund (non-restricted money), or capital expenditures (restricted money) like building new libraries.

The city's budget is a topic that takes a considerable amount of time to master. To Mayor Reed's credit, he is the first mayor who started a community process that helped share information regarding the budget process and the complexities that accompany it. For example, in January 2007, Mayor Reed held the Neighborhood Associations Priority Setting session, where neighborhood association presidents and others had a voice in the budget process. In January 2008, the mayor held the same meeting and went over the consultants report regarding budget options for San Jose.

During the 2008 meeting, the audience was asked to rank the choices that the consultants report came up with. I attended this meeting and had mixed feelings. I felt that our city staff was better versed on the topics than the consultant and that four hours is not enough time for the budget.

In addition, I also attended two of the mayor's Budget Shortfall Taskforce meetings (similar to Mayor Hammer's New Realities Taskforce in 1995) as well as three of labor's community budget working group meetings. More people offering new ideas in the budget process is a good thing.

A broader discussion of the budget, where we can do a deep dive into ideas brought by the public, will be on the Rules agenda on March 5.

This would allow the residents to understand the trade-offs of budget policy and allow more time to discuss good ideas.

Scenario:

There is a budget meeting at City Hall that you decide to attend with your neighbor. Your neighbor does not follow local government; he just knows that he pays his taxes and complains about potholes and hears about Little Saigon on TV. Knowing that both of you are attending and that you have two different levels of budget knowledge, what would you both want to learn from the meeting?

Do you want Budget 101?

Scholarly discussion?

PowerPoint mania?

Q & A?

Debate team?

Deep dive on only a few topics?

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